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Gender Equity, Equality and Empowerment of Women

(Chapter IV of the draft programme of action of the Conference)

Text submitted by the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Nicolaas Biegman (Netherlands) (Working Group II), on the basis of negotiations held on document A/CONF.171/PC/5

Chapter IV

GENDER EQUITY, EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

A. Empowerment and status of women

Basis for action

4.1. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status, is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men, and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized. The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve women's access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, alleviate their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal impediments to their participation in public life, and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of women also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction. This, in turn, is essential for the long-term success of population programmes. Experience shows that population and development programmes are most effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women.

4.2. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. More than 40 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that "everyone has the right to education". In 1990, Governments meeting at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, committed themselves to the goal of universal access to basic education. But despite notable efforts by countries around the globe that have appreciably expanded access to basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults in the world, of whom two thirds are women. More than one third of the world's adults, most of them women, have no access to printed knowledge, to new skills or to technologies that would improve the quality of their lives and help them shape and adapt to social and economic change. There are 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and 70 per cent of them are girls.

Objectives

4.3. The objectives are:

(a) To achieve [equality] [equity] based on harmonious partnership between men and women and enable women to realize their full potential;

(b) To ensure the enhancement of women's contributions to sustainable development through their full involvement in policy and decision-making processes at all stages and participation in all aspects of production, employment, income-generating activities, education, health, science and technology, sports, culture and population-related activities, as active decision-makers, participants and beneficiaries;

(c) To ensure that all women, as well as men, are provided with the education necessary for them to meet their basic human needs and to exercise their human rights.

Actions

4.4. Countries should act to empower women and should take steps to eliminate inequalities between men and women as soon as possible by:

(a) Establishing mechanisms for women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society and enabling women to articulate their concerns and needs;

(b) Promoting the fulfilment of women's potential through education, skill development and employment, giving paramount importance to the elimination of poverty, illiteracy and ill health among women;

(c) Eliminating all practices that discriminate against women; assisting women to establish and realize their rights, [... including those that relate to sexual and reproductive health ...];

(d) Adopting appropriate measures to improve women's ability to earn income beyond traditional occupations, achieve economic self-reliance, and ensure women's equal access to the labour market and social security systems;

(e) Eliminating violence against women;

(f) Eliminating discriminatory practices by employers against women, such as those based on proof of contraceptive use or pregnancy status;

(g) Making it possible, through laws, regulations and other appropriate measures, for women to combine the roles of child-bearing, breast-feeding and child-rearing with participation in the workforce.

4.5. All countries should make greater efforts to promulgate, implement and enforce national laws and international conventions to which they are party, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, that protect women from all types of economic discrimination and from

sexual harassment, and to implement fully the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. Countries are urged to sign, ratify and implement all existing agreements that promote women's rights.

4.5a. Governments at all levels should ensure that women can buy, hold and sell property and land equally with men, obtain credit and negotiate contracts in their own name and on their own behalf and exercise their legal rights to inheritance.

4.5b. Governments and employers are urged to eliminate gender discrimination in hiring, wages, benefits, training and job security with a view to eliminating gender-based disparities in income.

4.6. Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations should ensure that their personnel policies and practices comply with the principle of equitable representation of both sexes, especially at the managerial and policy-making levels, in all programmes, including population and development programmes. Specific procedures and indicators should be devised for gender-based analysis of development programmes and for assessing the impact of those programmes on women's social, economic and health status and access to resources.

4.7. Countries should take full measures to eliminate all forms of exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence against women, adolescents and children. This implies both preventive actions and rehabilitation of victims. Countries should prohibit degrading practices, such as trafficking in women, adolescents and children and forced prostitution, and pay special attention to protecting the rights and safety of those who suffer from these crimes and those in potentially exploitable situations, such as migrant women, women in domestic service and school girls. In this regard, international safeguards and mechanisms for cooperation should be put in place to ensure that these measures are implemented.

4.7 bis. Countries are urged to identify and condemn the systematic practice of rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of women as a deliberate instrument of war and ethnic cleansing and take steps to assure that full assistance is provided to the victims of such abuse for their physical and mental rehabilitation.

4.8. The design of family health and other development interventions should take better account of the demands on women's time from the responsibilities of child-rearing, household work and income-generating activities. Male responsibilities should be emphasized with respect to child-rearing and housework. Greater investments should be made in appropriate measures to lessen the daily burden of domestic responsibilities, the greatest share of which falls on women. Greater attention should be paid to the ways in which environmental degradation and changes in land use adversely affect the allocation of women's time. Women's domestic working environments should not adversely affect their health.

4.9. Every effort should be made to encourage the expansion and strengthening of grass-roots, community-based and activist groups for women. Such groups should be the focus of national campaigns to foster women's awareness of the full range of their legal rights, including their rights within the family, and to help women organize to achieve those rights.

4.10. Countries are strongly urged to enact laws and to implement programmes and policies which will enable employees of both sexes to organize their family and work responsibilities through flexible work-hours, parental leave, day-care facilities, maternity leave, policies that enable working mothers to breast-feed their children, health insurance and other such measures. Similar rights should be ensured to those working in the informal sector.

4.11. Programmes to meet the needs of growing numbers of elderly people should fully take into account that women represent the larger proportion of the elderly and that elderly women generally have a lower socio-economic status than elderly men.

B. The girl child

Basis for action

4.12. Since in all societies discrimination on the basis of sex often starts at the earliest stages of life, greater equality for the girl child is a necessary first step in ensuring that women realize their full potential and become equal partners in development. In a number of countries, the practice of prenatal sex selection, higher rates of mortality among very young girls, and lower rates of school enrolment for girls as compared with boys, suggest that "son preference" is curtailing the access of girl children to food, education and health care. This is often compounded by the increasing use of technologies to determine foetal sex, resulting in abortion of female foetuses. Investments made in the girl child's health, nutrition and education, from infancy through adolescence, are critical.

Objectives

4.13. The objectives are:

(a) To eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection;

(b) To increase public awareness of the value of the girl child, and concurrently, to strengthen the girl child's self-image, self-esteem and status;

(c) To improve the welfare of the girl child, especially in regard to health, nutrition and education.

Actions

4.14. Overall, the value of girl children to both their family and to society must be expanded beyond their definition as potential child-bearers and caretakers and reinforced through the adoption and implementation of educational and social policies that encourage their full participation in the development of the societies in which they live. Leaders at all levels of the society must speak out and act forcefully against patterns of gender discrimination within the family, based on preference for sons. One of the aims should be to eliminate excess mortality of girls, wherever such a pattern exists. Special education and public information efforts are needed to promote equitable treatment of girls and boys with respect to nutrition, health care, inheritance rights, education and social, economic and political activity.

4.15. Beyond the achievement of the goal of universal primary education in all countries [... before the year 2015 ...], all countries are urged to ensure the widest and earliest possible access by girls and women to secondary and higher levels of education, as well as vocational education and technical training, bearing in mind the need to improve the quality and relevance of that education.

4.15 bis (revised 4.20). Countries should take affirmative steps to keep girls and adolescents in school, by building more community schools, training teachers to be more gender sensitive, providing scholarships and other appropriate incentives, and by sensitizing parents to the value of educating girls, with the aim of closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005. Countries should also supplement those efforts by making full use of non-formal education opportunities. Pregnant adolescents should be enabled to continue their schooling.

4.16. Schools, the media and other social institutions should seek to eliminate stereotypes in all types of communication and educational materials that reinforce existing inequities between males and females and undermine girls' self-esteem. Countries must recognize that, in addition to expanding education for girls, teachers' attitudes and practices, school curricula and facilities must also change to reflect a commitment to eliminate all gender bias, while recognizing the specific needs of the girl child.

4.17. Countries should develop an integrated approach to the special nutritional, [... reproductive and sexual health ...], education and social needs of girls and young women, as such additional investments in adolescent girls can often compensate for earlier inadequacies in their nutrition and health care.

4.18. Governments should strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. In addition, Governments should strictly enforce laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and minimum age at marriage and should raise the minimum age at marriage where necessary. Governments and non-governmental organizations should generate social support for the enforcement of laws on minimum legal age at marriage, in particular by providing alternatives to early marriage, such as educational and employment opportunities.

4.19. Governments are urged to prohibit female genital mutilation wherever it exists and to give vigorous support to efforts among non-governmental and community organizations and religious institutions to eliminate such practices.

4.19 bis. Governments are urged to take the necessary measures to prevent infanticide, prenatal sex selection, trafficking in girl children and use of girls in prostitution and pornography. Sex selection through in-vitro fertilization techniques should be provided in accordance with appropriate ethical guidelines and medical standards.

C. Male responsibilities and participation

Basis for action

4.21. Changes in both men's and women's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are necessary conditions for achieving the harmonious partnership of men and women. Men play a key role in bringing about gender [equality] [equity] since, in most societies, men exercise preponderant power in nearly every sphere of life, ranging from personal decisions regarding the size of families to the policy and programme decisions taken at all levels of Government. It is essential to improve communication between men and women on issues of sex and sexuality and reproductive health, and the understanding of their joint responsibilities, so that men and women are equal partners in public and private life.

Objective

4.22. The objective is to promote gender [equality] [equity] in all spheres of life, including family and community life, and to encourage and enable men to take responsibility for their [... sexual and reproductive behaviour ...] and their social and family roles.

Actions

4.23. The equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including family planning, child-rearing and housework, should be promoted and encouraged by Governments. This should be pursued by means of information, education, communication, employment legislation and by fostering an economically enabling environment, such as family leave for men and women so that they may have more choice regarding the balance of their domestic and public responsibilities.

4.24. Special efforts should be made to emphasize men's shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, [... sexual and reproductive health and behaviour ...], including family planning; prenatal, maternal and child health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; prevention of unwanted and high-risk pregnancies; shared control and contribution to family income, children's education, health and nutrition; and recognition and promotion of the equal value of children of both sexes. Male responsibilities in family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest ages. Special emphasis should be placed on the prevention of violence against women and children.

4.25. Governments should take steps to ensure that children receive appropriate financial support from their parents by, among other measures, enforcing child-support laws. Governments should consider changes in law and policy to ensure men's responsibility to and financial support for their children and families. Such laws and policies should also encourage maintenance or reconstitution of the family unit. The safety of women in abusive relationships should be protected.

4.26. National and community leaders should promote the full involvement of men in family life and the full integration of women in community life. Parents and schools should ensure that attitudes that are respectful of women and girls as equals are instilled in boys from the earliest possible age, along with an understanding of their shared responsibilities in all aspects of a safe, secure and harmonious family life, [including sexual health and rights], and reproduction. Programmes to reach boys before they become sexually active are urgently needed.